

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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STATEMENT OF SECRETARY JOHN A. VOLPE BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ROADS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS REGARDING THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S HIGHWAY SAFETY PROGRAM, MONDAY, MAY 10, 1971.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Department of Transportation's Highway Safety Program--an affirmative action program designed to halt the senseless waste of human life on our Nation's highways. I know that this Committee, and you, Mr. Chairman, are as seriously concerned as I am over the 55,000 killed and millions more injured on our highways during 1970. In fact, more Americans die on the highways each year than have been killed in Vietnam during the entire war.

As disheartening as these figures are, I believe we have a strong and effective program that is just beginning to pay dividends. Last year there were 1,100 fewer traffic deaths than in the preceding year. This reduction occurred in spite of an increased exposure--5 million more cars, 3 million more drivers on our highways, and 55 billion more vehicle-miles driven. I am pleased to report that this progress has continued into 1971. The first quarter of this year shows a 3 percent reduction in fatalities over the same period last year. Therefore, I am not here today to acknowledge failure; I am here to express hope and pledge continued efforts to drastically reduce this grim toll.

Our goal is to see the numbers of people killed on our highways cut in half by 1980. Based on past fatality records and projections of the increased numbers of cars, licensed drivers and miles that will be driven, this goal might seem to be well out of reach. Personally, I believe that

we should set our sights high, Mr. Chairman, and extend ourselves to the fullest to reach this goal. We in America have been fortunate in seeing the impossible become the possible when our government and citizens make the kind of total commitment necessary to reach a particular goal. I would hope that kind of commitment will be made here. I know that kind of commitment has been made in my Department.

Let me assure you, Mr. Chairman, that as an absolute minimum we should realize a one-third reduction in the fatality rate on our highways by 1980. This will require a reduction in the rate of fatalities to 3.6 per 100 million vehicle miles. This goal must only be a minimum, however, for it would mean that there would still be 50,000 people killed on our highways in 1980.

I have spoken many times of what I consider to be my goals at the Department of Transportation. I have said on innumerable occasions, and many times before this very Committee, that I consider a balanced transportation system, sensitive to environmental considerations, a primary goal. I have spoken out as an advocate for balanced transportation because advocacy is needed. There are partisans of each of the modes, and there are advantages to each of the modes. My mandate and my mission is to blend these modes into a balanced system.

Safety on our highways is different. No one is against highway safety. No one favors death or disfigurement. No one need be convinced of the magnitude of the problem or the misery it brings--the heartaches and destruction to our societal fabric from families broken by needless death or crippling

injury. We all share the same deep concern. There is no need to argue-- only to act. And in the area of highway safety, I am acting.

Before I outline what the Department has done and what we will do, I wish to assure you, Mr. Chairman, that I have no priority higher than reducing this carnage on our highways. There is nothing more precious to me than human life. My term as Secretary of Transportation can bring no greater sense of personal satisfaction than contributing to the reduction in loss of life and limb on our highways.

In October of 1969, the President established a Task Force on Highway Safety. Its mandate was to consider the effectiveness of our Nation's highway safety efforts. The membership was comprised of a broadly representative group of 12 members, all active and involved in the field of highway safety.

In December of 1969 the Task Force issued a report entitled, "Mobility Without Mayhem." The report was circulated to those concerned and was officially released last fall without fanfare because none was needed. It was a somber and realistic study of the highway safety problem, and it recommended goals and objectives for our highway safety effort. Its recommendations have been reviewed, analyzed, and, almost entirely, accepted. It has reinforced our confidence in some of our current practices and given us insights into others. Let me, therefore, review with you some of its recommendations and how we are attempting to effect those recommendations and others which have been initiated by the Department. When I am finished, I think you will have a fairly complete picture of our highway safety program.

--The report recommended as a primary goal an immediate leveling off of the death toll and a lessening of the economic loss caused by highway accidents. In the long term, it looked to a progressive reduction in both these figures.

I have already cited statistics which show that we turned the corner last year, and I am hopeful that this will be the beginning of a continuing downward trend in highway deaths. While it is too early to correlate this trend with a specific part of the highway safety program, at least we know we are making headway.

--The report recommended that through increased funding, highway safety be established as a major national goal.

For fiscal year 1972 we have proposed a program level for the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration of \$155.6 million, which is an increase of \$37 million over fiscal year 1971, and a \$56 million increase over the program level established for the National Highway Safety Bureau for fiscal year 1970. This \$155.6 million figure is broken down as follows: (1) \$70 million for highway safety programs under section 402 of the Highway Safety Act of 1966; (2) \$44.7 million for highway safety research and development under section 403 of that Act; and (3) \$40.9 million for the motor vehicle program under the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966. In addition, we have also proposed a program level of \$10 million for fiscal year 1972 for the Federal Highway Administration's portion of our highway safety program and \$3.1 million for highway safety research and development. I think these figures indicate, Mr. Chairman, that we at the Department have a dynamic action safety program geared to the vehicle, the driver, the highway and the total driving environment.

The Federal Highway Administration is also exploring new ways of utilizing highway funds for highway safety, and the States have significantly increased their funding of State-wide safety programs.

In terms of funding, the report called for the use of highway trust fund monies for highway safety programs. The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1970 has made provision to fund two-thirds of the Federal share of the highway safety program out of the highway trust fund. As this Committee is well aware, the Administration had asked for full trust fund financing, and we appreciated the support of this Committee in that effort last year. When the Congress enacts the President's Transportation Revenue Sharing Act of 1971, it will provide that monies may be appropriated from the highway trust fund on a proportional basis for all highway related transportation activities financed by State and local governments. Highway safety program activities are specifically included in such highway related transportation activities.

--The report recommended that there should be an appropriate office at the State level to monitor the highway safety program, and that there should be studies by the Federal Government to determine improved means of managing and administering the highway safety program.

We have already begun this effort in the Department. Further, by virtue of the Highway Act of 1970, each State is required to have "a State agency which shall have adequate powers, and be suitably equipped and organized to carry out, to the satisfaction of the Secretary, such a (safety) program." Likewise, we fund State safety efforts based on annual work plans coordinated and submitted at the State level. These plans are approved on

the regional level. Further, the Federal Highway Administration is now involving its division offices located in each State in the administration of its part of the highway safety program.

Later in my testimony, Mr. Chairman, I will point out to the Committee some of the difficulties with which we are faced in implementing and administering our highway safety programs.

--The report recommended an increase in funding for the Highway Spot Safety and TOPICS programs, and also recommended flexibility and innovation in the application of safety design standards.

Again, we have already moved in this direction. The Federal Highway Administration has been working on the spot improvement program since 1964. Since then, work has either been programmed or completed on 6,376 projects at a total cost of 1.23 billion dollars. Early last month, the Federal Highway Administrator signed a directive urging each State highway department to set aside during 1971 an amount equivalent to 10 percent of its annual ABC authorization for projects to eliminate or reduce hazards at specific locations on the Federal-aid systems.

--The report recommended that additional study should be given to the behavioral aspects of driving, both physical and psychological.

We are currently studying this problem and hope to have some results shortly. Changing human behavior is very difficult and, quite frankly, this is the area in which we anticipate having the most difficulty.

We have been most active in the driver education area. Since the passage of the Highway Safety Act, approximately 20 percent of the available Federal funding has been used in this area. Through education by simulation and by developing new and effective curriculum materials we hope to successfully

reach our young. In addition, ongoing research within the Federal Highway Administration is continuing to investigate those elements of the driving environment which are known to be used as visual cues by the driver in his performance of the driving task.

--The report recommended a stepped up law enforcement program against those who endanger the lives of others on the highway. We agree. We are in the process of awarding contracts to three communities for demonstration projects in selective traffic enforcement. We are planning five additional sites in fiscal year 1972. A pilot program under way in Flint, Michigan, has resulted in a 57 percent reduction in fatalities in the first year. The other items recommended in this part of the report have either been considered or implemented.

--The report recommended an increased awareness of an emphasis on the role alcohol plays in highway fatalities. More than one-half of the deaths on our highways are alcohol related. We must recognize that if we are to halt this tragic toll on our highways, we must attack the problem drinker. His over-involvement in accidents is common knowledge. We are now concentrating our efforts in this area. Through authorizations made available in the Highway Safety Act of 1970, we have mounted a major national program of research, public education, manpower development, increased emphasis in the grant program and local demonstrations. These local demonstrations, called ASAP--Alcohol Safety Action Programs--are the heart of our program. Doug Toms, my safety Administrator, in his testimony before your Committee will explain our program more fully. I would point out, however, that currently we have 29 alcohol safety action programs under way, with 11 more requested in our fiscal year 1972 budget.

Further, the Secretary of HEW and I have signed an inter-agency agreement to coordinate our alcohol-related activities. Extensive efforts have also been made to bring the alcohol level needed for legal intoxication and the testing standards to the same level in each State. We are also about to sign an agreement with the Department of Justice to mesh our efforts in this area with the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

Likewise, we are moving ahead with the related problem of the effects of drugs and medicine in driving. We are coordinating this part of our program with the American Medical Association, the National Institute for Mental Health, and the Department of Justice's Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

--The report recommended additional support for research and development in the highway safety area. In this regard, our new Transportation Systems Center at Cambridge, Massachusetts, has already proven exceedingly useful.

--The report recommends accelerated action on safety through work on the highway.

We are currently conducting a special safety program to stimulate improvement of existing facilities through field visits to examine operating conditions on Interstate and other facilities.

--The report recommended new efforts to stimulate education and training in highway safety and auto repairs. Again, Doug Toms will provide you with details you may require in this area. I shall only say that under section 402 of the Highway Safety Act, many States and local communities have conducted training projects. In this effort, over 900 training

projects have been conducted and an estimated 135,000 safety personnel have been provided this training. In addition, fellowships are proposed as part of the 1972 training activities of FHWA. This effort will be expanded as the National Highway Institute becomes operative. We plan to continue manpower development activities of this type to provide a management tool at all levels of State and local government.

As you can see, Mr. Chairman, to a remarkable degree, a large portion of our highway safety program parallels the Task Force report. This is understandable, however. The Department had the benefit of many of these individuals' views, even before the Task Force was formed, as part of their continuing interaction with interested organizations outside the government.

Aside from this report, let me mention some of the Department's other significant developments in this area.

More than 1,500 pieces of State legislation have been passed since enactment of the Highway Safety Act in 1966 implementing our highway safety standards.

- . Fifty-one States and jurisdictions have enacted implied consent laws.

- . Twenty-seven States have adopted the presumptive level of blood-alcohol of 0.10 percent recommended by our standard--only four States had this level at the end of 1966.

- . Eighteen States have adopted legislation providing for motor vehicle inspection, making a total of 33 who now require inspection.

Recently, I sent letters to the Governors showing them how their legislative and administrative actions rank with other States in their compliance with our 16 Highway Safety Standards.

Each State's status and prospective performance in each standard was reviewed by our Traffic Safety Administration personnel, who objectively weighed all the evaluative factors and assigned appropriate grades.

I might point out that aside from our alcohol program, very few "A's" were handed out.

Needless to say, we received correspondence. Expectedly, the letters expressing cooperation constituted only a slight majority of all those we received. Nevertheless, we plan to make "Report Cards" a regular event.

The Federal-aid procedures have been greatly simplified. Instead of approval of requests by the States on a project-by-project, piecemeal basis, the States will annually submit their entire planned highway safety activities in an Annual Highway Safety Work Program. This plan is a mechanism whereby local, State and Federal officials have an opportunity for coordination and review of the entire annual undertaking by each State and to get approval at all levels for the entire effort.

Although I have previously mentioned many programs administered by the Federal Highway Administration, let me briefly point out some additional contributions made by the Federal Highway Administration toward our balanced highway safety program. The 42,500 mile Interstate System has progressed rapidly, with more than 31,500 miles now open to traffic. These are significant figures because the Interstate System has been shown to be twice as safe as conventional highways. A conservative estimate is that

since the conception of this program in 1956, the construction of these modern highways has saved more than 30,000 lives.

Particularly beneficial has been the development of the "forgiving highway", which has flat slopes, breakaway sign supports and light poles, more effective guardrails, and impact attenuation devices to protect drivers from immovable objects at gores and structures. Research in these areas is continuing, and more design improvements will be made in the years ahead. Older sections, which were built before these new standards were developed, are being upgraded. The result will be a highway with an even better safety record in the years to come.

The 1970 Highway Safety Act identified two areas for expanded effort, namely railroad crossings and the bridge replacement program. Implementation of these programs is a significant effort of FHWA and State highway departments.

This, in essence, is our highway safety program. Frank Turner, my Highway Administrator, and Doug Toms, my Safety Administrator, will be outlining in testimony later this week the specifics of their Administration's efforts.

I frankly think we can be justifiably proud of our efforts in this area, and I am most hopeful of our prospects for continued improvement. I think Congress has provided us with the necessary legislative tools and we must continue to improve their full and effective implementation.

Before concluding, Mr. Chairman, I will now discuss some of the problems we face in fully and effectively implementing our highway safety program. It is important for everyone to understand that although the

Department has the power to promulgate, and has promulgated, standards for the highway safety program, the issuance of the standard is not tantamount to effective implementation by the States. Congress wisely passed legislation which required the establishment of uniform national standards for highway safety. Yet, the enforcement of these standards is tied directly to the use of Federal funds--either by the expenditure of funds for approved highway safety programs or the withholding of Federal highway funds for a State's failure to comply with its program as approved by the Secretary.

Although these monetary sanctions are available, the powers of persuasion and direct negotiation and "gentle arm-twisting", if you will, are presently our most effective methods in dealing with the States. In most instances, this has been enough. Many States cooperate fully and our negotiations with them have been successful. These States have adopted our standards. A notable example of the success of this technique has been our alcohol program.

It has been almost a year and a half since the States have been required to have a highway safety program approved by the Secretary. All States have such a plan which has been so approved. At this time I feel the process of interchange and cooperation between the Federal and State governments has been working quite well. I am hopeful that as we can increase our manpower, thereby increasing the opportunities to work with the States and convince them of the merits of our program and our standards, we will do even better. Of course, we will continually assess our progress.

If this progress falls below acceptable levels we will either have to utilize our current monetary sanctions or, if we feel it desirable return to Congress and seek a more effective means of compliance.

In concluding, I wish to reemphasize our concerns for the unnecessary lives lost each year on our highways and our dedication to preserving these lives. There is no greater priority within the Department.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would now be pleased to answer any questions that you and the Committee may have.